

CAHS

Connecticut Association for Human Services
110 Bartholomew Avenue - Suite 4030
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Michael S. Rohde, President
James P. Horan, Executive Director
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Submitted by Jude Carroll, Connecticut Kids Count Project Director
Connecticut Association for Human Services
February 10, 2009**

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Merrill, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jude Carroll; I'm the Director of the Connecticut Kids Count Project at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). I'm here today to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Office of the Child Advocates (OCA).

Faced with a precipitous drop in state revenue and a budget deficit in the billions, policymakers must now make difficult decisions. CAHS believes that Governor Rell and our state legislators should take the long view on budget priorities, preserving the integrity of programs that support the well-being of the state. CAHS is very concerned that policymakers keep their commitments to children and families as well as to the economy. We understand that during these difficult times, all state-funded programs are subject to cuts, but a balanced budget should not come at the expense of the most vulnerable.

The Office of the Child Advocate is charged with a truly difficult task, representing the best interests and safety of children and working to improve policies and programs related to child abuse and neglect, juvenile justice, foster care, and residential facilities. The work that OCA provides to the state and its citizens cannot be reduced to a one-person staff. Among the services that the Office administers are:

- ❖ Advocating on behalf of our most vulnerable children—those who have experienced abuse and/or neglect;
- ❖ Overseeing state agencies charged with maintaining the care and well-being of children served by the state of Connecticut;
- ❖ Staffing the Child Fatality Review Panel, charged with reviewing unexplained or unexpected deaths of children and youth; and
- ❖ Educating the public about rules, regulations, and state responsibility related to children who are placed under state supervision.

While the Office works closely and effectively with the Attorney General, cutting staff and placing OCA duties within the AG's office will not provide anywhere near the level of oversight needed to monitor the systems for which they are responsible.

A balanced budget must be devised from a mix of cuts in services, reductions in tax credits and exemptions, and increases in taxes. Connecticut is a state that has taken its commitment to children and families most seriously. A balanced budget that disproportionately hits the most vulnerable members of our society who have the least opportunity to present their interests before state government and civil society is not a budget that the people of Connecticut can be proud of. We hope you will work with the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee and members of the House and Senate leadership to craft a budget that reflects equity as well as fiscal responsibility.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today.